

An exception to 'Nordic penal exceptionalism'? – A mixed methods approach to news on rape crime sentencing in Helsingin Sanomat (2005-2020)

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Summary

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This master's thesis looks at the representations of rape crime sentencing in the largest daily newspaper in Finland, Helsingin Sanomat, from 2005 to 2020.

Inspired by the Nordic penal exceptionalism theory this thesis set out to examine the notion whether Finland has resisted the punitive turn when it comes to rape crime through the lense of news reporting of rape crime sentencing principles. Relevant theories in addition to Nordic penal exceptionalism are social constructionism, penal populism and moral panics.

The data was collected using a mixed methods approach to content analysis. Pieces of news on rape crime sentences (n=103) were examined quantitatively to see how news reporting on rape crime has developed in Helsingin Sanomat over the past fifteen (15) years and what types of trends are present in the news reporting. The quantitative data also compares the image of rape crime created by Helsingin Sanomat to the reality of rape crime.

In addition to news pieces the editorials or leading articles (n=16) and articles (n=55) were analyzed through an inductive qualitative content analysis where themes were allowed to emerge from the data. The qualitative data was separated in to four distinct categories: lenient sentencing and value discussions, statistics, immigrants as a threat and consent-based legislation and feminist discourse.

The research results show that the news on rape crime do not reflect the reality of rape crime and that there are overrepresentations of unknown perpetrators and perpetrators with a foreign name. A quantitative analysis was not sufficient to understand the social discussions surrounding the sentence news reporting so the qualitative data was needed to point out penal populist trends in the media representations of rape crime sentencing and to analyze the construction of moral panics through overrepresenting immigrants as a threat to social order. The notion that Nordic media has resisted a punitive turn is thereby not accurate, at least when it comes to rape crime.

Keywords: rape crime, content analysis, moral panics, Nordic penal exceptionalism, penal populism, social constructionism, sentencing policy, mixed methods, crime and media

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INTRODUCTION

The topic for this master's thesis first started to develop in my mind in 2009 as rape crime sentencing and its leniency was a focal point of multiple media discussions in Finland. As I was studying sociology at the university of Glasgow at the time and taking multiple criminology courses, I kept being faced with the juxtaposition of harsh penal climates in Anglophone countries and more welfare driven Nordic countries that have resisted the punitive turn.

The change towards a harsher penal climate in Anglophone countries has been covered by many criminologists, most famously by David Garland and his 'Culture of Control' thesis (2001). According to Garland, ever since the late 1980's British and American political actors have responded to "widespread public concern about crime and security by formulating policies that punish and exclude" (p.202). Finland and other Nordic countries have been thought to have resisted the trend of a harshening penal climate.

For example Pratt (2011) asserts that some modern societies (mostly Anglo-American) have transitioned into more "expressive and severe penalties" but that in particular the Scandinavian countries have "remained largely immune to those trends" (p.220). But all too often in Anglo-American criminological literature Scandinavia's and Finland's rejection of the harshening penal climate is taken as a given, and the Nordic countries are lumped together although their politics do vary in many important aspects.

Nordic penal exceptionalism

The biggest inspiration for me to take on the challenge to see how Finland and its penal climate fares in comparison to this theory was Ugelvik and Dullum's (2012) book on 'Nordic penal exceptionalism'. The book is a collection of articles that are based on the fact that Nordic countries are vastly different to other Western societies when it comes to penal policies, sentencing and public discourse.

Studying these British and American scholars that looked up to the Nordic countries as societies where criminal policy was not affected by political populism, public opinion and sensationalized media, I found that there was a huge gap in what I was reading on the pages of my university books and what I was reading in the Finnish media.

Discussions about rape crime

During the past two decades rape sentencing has become the focus of a wide media discussion in Finland. Highly publicized cases have sparked widespread dismay in the Finnish media on multiple occasions during the past twenty years. In 2002 a reduced sentence on a Court of Appeals case in Eastern Finland led to a discussion of regional differences of sentences for sexual crimes and a call for more comprehensive and explicit groundings for sentences by the Courts. In 2009, when a policeman's sentence for raping a 15-year old was reduced again by the Court of Appeals in Eastern Finland, an increase in the media discussion about rape crime policy was notable. Multiple newspapers in Finland, including Helsingin Sanomat, Aamulehti, Ilta-Sanomat and Hufvudstadsbladet, called for the Minister of Justice directly to take action on what was perceived by the media and general public as injustices by the Finnish judicial system.

In 2011 after MP Pertti Hemmilä called the Minister of Justice Tuija Brax out on lenient sentencing of serious violent crime and the "general public's lack of faith in the integrity of the Finnish criminal justice system" in a written question, the Minister promised that the Ministry of Justice will look into the reformation of sexual crime law and the need to harshen punishments (Hemmilä & Brax, 2011).

The 2010's brought new aspects to rape crime news coverage as highly publicized rape cases involving asylum seekers hit the press. For example the 2015 case in Kempele where two asylum seekers were suspected of raping a 14-year old started a wide media panic that looked to protect girls and women. Although the discussion surrounding lenient sentencing was not new, the Kempele case ushered in a new threat: men of immigrant backgrounds raping women and under aged girls. This discussion was amplified when a group of Somali-background men were given non-custodial sentences for a rape near the Tapanila train station.

The Me Too movement in 2017 brought the feminist perspective that had been long standing in feminist discussions about rape crime to the forefront of news coverage. In the aftermath of Me Too a campaign called Suostumus2018 (Consent2018) collected over 55,000 signatures in a citizen's initiative and the proposed change to rape law was brought to the parliament in September 2018. For example Ojala (2014) notes that as discourse on gender equality has increased more focus has been put on rape crime and

it has had a major effect on legislation (p.51). In 2014 rape law was changed so that the lowest level of rape, pakottaminen sukupuoliyhteyteen (forcing sexual intercourse) as it was found that sex doesn't have anything to do with rape and all rapes should be processed as such in the Finnish judicial system.

In 2010 Terttu Utriainen published a book that went through three years worth of rape cases and sentences and was by her own words shocked at the brutality of the crime. Aggravated rapes were by definition brutal, but some of those crimes that were prosecuted as rapes were definitely as aggravated and brutal in their manner. Despite this the punitive levels of rape had steadied off at 1,5 years to 2,5 years sentences and had remained at that level for a while. Finland also had the highest level of non-custodial sentences of all the Nordic countries. Utriainen concludes her study with vocally addressing the fact that Finland's sentences for rape are too lenient. She has then been the go-to expert on all things rape sentencing related in the media.

Punitiveness in Finland and Scotland

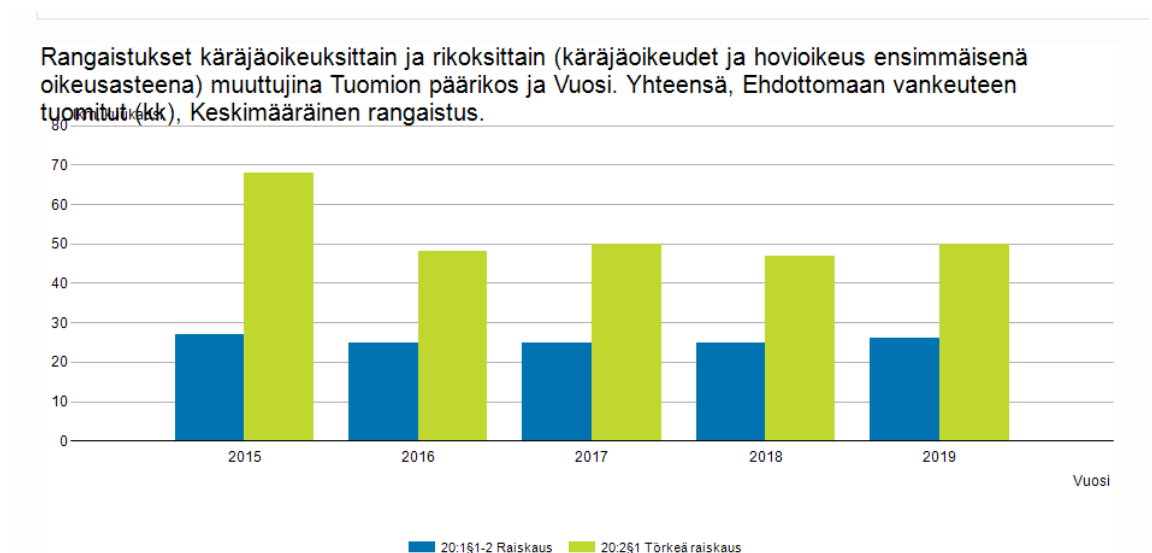
As this thesis first started to form at the University of Glasgow in the form of an undergraduate thesis I found it interesting to compare Finnish imprisonment data to Scotland's. The two countries are very similar when it comes to population (5,454,000 in Scotland, and 5,518,000 in Finland in October 2020), but couldn't be further apart when it comes to statistics traditionally used to measure the levels of punitiveness. Thereby Scotland would be an example of a more punitive penal climate representing the Anglo-American trends in penal policy, and Finland would represent a lenient approach to sentencing, as an example of Nordic exceptionalism.

When I was writing my undergraduate thesis in 2013, the Scottish prison population had grown from the 2002-2003 figure of 6,445 to 8,176 in 2011-2012 and was expected to reach 9,500 in 2020-2021, making up an increase of 47% (Scottish Government, 2012). The projections were somewhat wrong as the prison population in Scotland stands at around 8,200 in 2020 after taking a dip in the mid 2010's (Scottish Government, 2020). At the same time the Finnish prison population had gone down from the 2002 figure of 3433 (down from a record high in the early 90's) to 2011's 3265 (Rikosseuraamuslaitos, 2012) and was projected to remain steady in the future (Hallamaa, 2012). In 2018, which was the most up to date figure, the average amount of prisoners was 2910

(Rikosseuraamuslaitos, 2019). Finland is in fact exceeding expectations in low imprisonment levels.

The differences are even more tangible when looked through the average sentence lengths for rape (Finland vs. Scotland). Finland's average for rape, 27,1 months, equivalent of 2 years and 3 months in 2010 (Optula, 2012, p.168) seems slight if compared to the 2010 UK figure of 97 months, equivalent of a little over eight years (Travis, 2011). In 2019 Finland's average custodial sentences for rape were 26,1 months and for aggravated rape 50 months (Statistics Finland, 2020).

Graph 1: Average length of custodial sentences for rape (blue) and aggravated rape (green) by year 2015-2019



Graph 1 even shows a slight decrease of custodial sentence lengths for aggravated rape. As there can be large fluctuations from year to year it's not easy to say anything about trends in punitiveness based on such a short amount of time. What is evident though is that over the past five years rape sentences have been nearly identical in their lengths each year. There seems to be no increase in sentence lengths.

Yet the figures on imprisonment and sentence lengths, and their changes in the past 5 or 20 years, don't say enough about penal climates by themselves. The judicial system does not exist in a vacuum and is influenced by changes in legislation, which is influenced by politics, which is influenced by public discussions. Although there are limited ways to address this causality directly, it's important sociologically to look at the discussions

surrounding rape crime sentencing in order to get a complete picture of the penal climate in Finland. Political and public discussions need to be taken into account and looking at media discourses is an increasingly important avenue in doing so. This is why this master's thesis looks at media representations of rape crime sentencing.

The rise of right-wing politics and penal populism

Another important shift in Finland has been the rise of rightwing politics. The 2011 Parliamentary elections saw the surge of a new, value conservative party in Finland. Perussuomalaiset ("True Finns" or officially Finns Party) gained the highest election victory in the history of Finland, gaining 39 seats (of 200) compared to their 2007 5 seats. The Finns were the first political party in years to openly campaign with the intent to harshen penalties, reduce the number of non-custodial sentences and the deportation of foreign citizens who commit crimes (Perussuomalaiset.fi, 2011).

During their campaign they introduced the term 'value discussion', a term that took flight in media discussions on rape. The Finns asked: what are the values we hold as a Finnish society when we let sex criminals get off with lenient sentences?

The Finns have a long-standing history of creating us vs them paradigms. Anti-immigration policies is one of the reasons for their popularity, and in their political discourse rape crime and immigrants are lumped together ruthlessly. Jussi Halla-Aho, the leader of the Finns wrote in his blog the following statement:

"I am still, and will be in the future, sincerely and with all my heart happy if a female who disagrees with deporting immigrant rapists gets raped by an immigrant rapist."

Pratt (2011) argues that the homogeneity of Finnish society (and other Nordic societies) that lead to high levels of "mutual identification ... have been eroded as immigration has increased" (p. 236). It is true that for a long time Finland was a very homogenous country due to its location in the cold excluded North. Immigration has changed the make up of Finland. The lack of mutual identification that Pratt refers to can be seen as a cause for the birth of anti-immigration political parties as they openly promote a message of division and exclusion, a message that offers a potential breeding ground for penal populism.

This us vs them ideology can be dangerous when combined with a lack of belief in experts and lowering trust levels against government officials. Garland (2001) believes that the discussion of imprisonment and sentencing policies has moved away from the previously prominent experts as public approval has become key in the political process for most dominant parties in the UK and the US.

These types of political trends can also be seen in Finland. In 2015 prime minister Juha Sipilä's comments on the economy raised eyebrows when he discredited experts by calling them "all kinds of docents" arousing a discussion on whether experts have lost their power in the face of rightwing politics.

This type of an emergent political atmosphere cannot be considered irrelevant when considering media representations of different types of crime, legislation, sentencing principles or penal policy. In Finland that public approval is often brought to surface on the pages of the largest daily broadsheet, Helsingin Sanomat. With many people turning to a particular medium to feed their political appetite, it is important to look at the representations of that medium as impactful and crucial to the construction of the understanding of crime and punitiveness and the creation of social issues.

As the discourse on rape crime legislation has been happening for over 15 years this master's thesis will look at the discussions of rape crime sentencing principles during that time in the largest daily newspaper in Finland, Helsingin Sanomat.

Research questions

This master's thesis focuses on the following research questions

- how has news reporting on rape crime developed in the largest newspaper in Finland (Helsingin sanomat) over the past fifteen (15) years
- what types of quantitative and qualitative trends can be found in the media coverage and discourse on rape crime sentencing
- how does the news reporting of rape crime reflect 'real crime'
- are there penal populist tendencies in the coverage of rape crime sentencing
- are there reflections of moral panics in the coverage of rape crime sentencing

- does the current sentencing policy and the penal climate presented in the news agree with the Nordic Penal Exceptionalism thesis

These research questions might become more specific as the data is analyzed as a mixed methods approach to content analysis is used that allows for new themes to emerge from the data itself. Taking that into consideration the hypothesis for this master's thesis is that media discussions represent a change in penal climate that, when it comes to rape crime, calls for harsher sentences.

In the following chapter this thesis will look at all the theoretical backgrounds that relate to these research questions. The chapter takes a further look into Nordic Penal Exceptionalism and how it specifically relates to media discussions. It goes through what penal populism is and how it can be present in hyper-medialised rape cases. It dives into moral panics as a means to analyze media discussions and social constructionism as an underlying sociological ideology for this thesis.

The Theoretical perspectives chapter also includes a run down of previous Finnish research on similar topics to this thesis.

Next it was felt that the discussion was important to place in the context of Finnish rape legislation as its integral to understanding sentencing before taking on the relationship between crime and media and the methods used in the analysis process.

The methodology and findings section goes through the mixed methods approach used in this master's thesis and expands upon the quantitative and qualitative content analysis used. The data collection process is explained before going first through the quantitative results and then the qualitative findings.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data will be looked at through the research questions, what are the changes and trends present in the data set, what is the image of rape crime and its sentencing like compared to the reality of rape crime.

Are there penal populist tendencies visible? How does the moral panic theory relate to rape crime sentencing in the media? These are some of the questions that will be address in the qualitative findings section.

Lastly the findings will be put together to a larger context of Nordic penal exceptionalism, the so what of it all will be looked at. What was the point of this thesis? What do the results say? How can we further understand the sociological contexts of media discussions about rape crime sentencing? What are some ideas for future research?

The aim of this master's thesis is to investigate how punitive attitudes are made visible through media discourses and shine a light on a discussion that has been overlooked by the assumption of Nordic penal exceptionalism.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This master's thesis was inspired by the term *Nordic penal exceptionalism*. Referring to a lenient penal climate in the Nordic countries the Ugelvik and Dullum theory states that Nordic countries have more lenient policies and lower imprisonment rates than their anglophone counterparts. While I started studying sociology and criminology, there were huge discussions in the Finnish media and political sphere about harshening sentences for rapists and how the legislation should be changed. I started to wonder whether rape crime was an exception to this resistance of anglophone trends in punitiveness.

In this chapter, we will look at not just the Ugelvik and Dullum theory, but other sociological and criminological theories that apply to media representations of sex crime sentencing such as *penal populism* and *the moral panic theory*. We will also go through how media and crime relate to one another and what type of previous international and Finnish research on the topic of sex crime and media have been conducted. Lastly we'll go through a brief history of rape crime sentencing in Finland.

Nordic penal exceptionalism and the media

"Penal Exceptionalism?: Nordic Prison Policy and Practice", the 2012 contribution to criminal sociology by Ugelvik and Dullum aspired to define the Scandinavian *modus operandi* within penal policy, the famous Nordic model that had resisted the Anglophone punitive turn, and retained a moderate penal climate. Using Finland as an example, the book showcased a dramatic reduction in the prison population since the

90's. The pair calls this phenomenon 'Nordic penal exceptionalism': an understanding of Nordic penal policy as more lenient when it comes to sentencing policies and imprisonment rates. This thesis has become a given in most American and European criminological academic writing concerning penal climates.

Criminologists such as Pratt (2005), Cavadino and Dignan (2006), Nelken (2011), and Tonry (2008) have all agreed that the Nordic countries have avoided the change towards a harsher penal climate: resisting John Pratt's concept of penal populism (2007) and David Garland's 'Culture of control' thesis (2001) and generally adopting a "more humane and mild penal regime because of their distinct welfare states .. rooted in social cohesion, conformity and egalitarianism" (Barker, 2012, quoted in Pratt & Eriksson, 2012, p.7).

Those that have analysed causes for this alleged resistance to the punitive turn (f.e. Green (2012), Bondeson (2005), Pratt (2005)) suggest that the nature of Nordic media outlets has been considered to act as an important intervening variable in resisting the ushering in of Anglo-American punitive trends in addition to other cultural, political and social factors.

David A. Green (2008), one of the contributors to the Ugelvik and Dullum collection, notes that newspapers in the Nordic countries distinctly lack the attributes brought on by "convergence pressures, sensationalism or 'publishing whatever brings profit'" (p.65) and that Nordic newspapers don't display the same dominant attributes as the tabloid-driven United Kingdom does with "sensationalism, conflict, anti-elite bias, common-sense solutions and outrage" (p.66).

Bondeson (2005) asserts that it is possible that media in the Nordic countries exercises a more restraining role and that ethical rules for journalists are probably stricter than many other countries as the press is considered to have a more responsible role (p.194). While this remains true, as Finland's Journalistiliitto (Journalistic Alliance) guidelines are widely accepted by journalists, it does not monitor under- or overrepresentations, representations that as this thesis will argue shape conceptions of how people perceive the world and crime levels to be like.

Many of these writers that have made conclusions about the Finnish press and its role in influencing the country's penal policy are however, either writing from an outside perspective, offering very little empirical data to support their theory or have collected their data and formulated their opinion in the early 2000's, after which the internet revolution has transformed the boundaries of the mass media by free and open access to news 24/7, giving birth to the power of the 'click' in a market driven industry.

Green (2012) argues that a comparative study on the effects of the 'punitive turn' shows how well Finnish politics has resisted the punitive trends, and that the media in Finland has not converged in the same way as in other countries. As it is not market force driven, and hasn't become homogenized (p.71), i.e. hasn't become led by liberal market values, it hasn't changed and become sensationalized and tabloidized as its UK counterparts. However this study does not include sufficient Finnish data and generalizes Nordic countries' penal climates and their media coverage as identical.

There is then a need to look at the nature of crime news in Finland specifically in order to verify or deny claims of this Nordic neutrality and press integrity.

Penal populism

One of the driving forces behind this thesis, was the observation that rape crime and its sentencing had become increasingly present in Finnish media.

Ever since the early 2000's changing political atmospheres have arisen in the Nordics. For example Norway has become increasingly more punitive and their incarceration rates have gone up (Nilsson 2020, p. 18) and right wing parties have taken hold in most of the Nordics, including Finland. These parties have brought sentencing, immigration and other topics that relate to the justice system to the fore front of their political campaigns and there by discussions about crime, its prevalence and the values surrounding sentencing principles have become a part of public discussion and opinion.

Pratt's (2007) definition of a penal populist driven society is based on a multitude of factors: the decline of trust in government, discrediting expertise, sensational rather than objective media reporting and the politicization of victimhood associated with such developments are indicators of a legal policy turning to penal populism.

For Pratt (2011) “the changing structure of the news media has contributed to the changes in modes of knowledge because of its preoccupation with crime and punishment issues” (p. 234). He continues to assert that “the media have fuelled perceptions that crime is increasing, adding legitimacy to those law and order lobbyists, who vividly draw attention to this menace, while detracting to that of academic commentators who discuss crime in a more detached, analytical fashion. The latter seem to play down its threat even though in the media, the main source of information about it for most people, it is ever-present, and in need of immediate punitive responses” (p.234).

Bonner (2019) has written extensively about the rise of punitive populism in Latin America and the media’s role in influencing public opinion. She feels that media offers an important avenue for expressing public opinion and believes it’s an essential democratic forum for criminal justice debates, but to work as such it needs to be a full debate that shows different sides to the story and allows for all parties to voice their opinion (p.49-50).

Bonner also quotes James Curran’s ideas about Nordic media as one that is radical in its representativeness of different social groups, allowing multiple voices to be included in public opinion debates.

This thesis will look at how Pratt’s ideas of penal populism are reflected in the discussions surrounding rape in Helsingin Sanomat and thereby we can evaluate whether the discourse has had penal populist tendencies that would discredit the ideology that Finland has resisted a penal populist turn, at least when it comes to the media and political discourse.

Media as a source of information about crime

This dissertation aims to look at the nature and development of news, articles and editorials on rape crime sentencing in the Finnish media within the past 15 years.

The data for this dissertation is gathered through the online resource of the largest newspaper in Finland, Helsingin Sanomat. Helsingin Sanomat is, although a local newspaper from the capital city Helsinki, the most widely read newspaper in Finland

with the highest number of monthly subscribers of the paper version and an average reach of nearly 2 million Finns.

Finland has traditionally been a country with high subscription rates for newspapers, but with the internet revolution and especially the development of social media and news apps subscription rates have fallen dramatically creating a new framework for newspapers to navigate in. But with digital subscriptions and partial free content online 2020 welcomed the largest readership ever for Helsingin Sanomat (HS, 2020).

In Finland the most popular newspapers have not really been labeled as politically affiliated. Yet recently the editorials or leading articles of Helsingin Sanomat have included an end statement:

Pääkirjoitukset ovat HS:n kannanottoja ajankohtaiseen aiheeseen. Kirjoitukset laatii HS:n pääkirjoitustoimitus, ja ne heijastavat lehden periaatelinjaa.

The leading articles are HS's contentions on current events. The texts are written by the HS editorial desk and they reflect the newspaper's principles.

Helsingin Sanomat labels itself then as an objective voice on particular issues, it has an opinion based on the newspaper's own values and principles. This statement makes the newspaper more political as it explicitly takes a stand in discussions about current events.

Although there could have been other ways to look at whether Finnish rape crime sentencing and the policies surrounding it fit the Nordic penal exceptionalism thesis, like studying sentence lengths and police statistics, this thesis focuses on the relationship between crime and media from a more social perspective.

Nowadays the media landscape is highly fragmented but there seems to be a general acceptance of newspapers as more reliable sources of information than other media outlets (for example social media, film, tv shows, podcasts).

Crime has always been a popular topic in the media. Although it's relationship with public opinion and understanding of crime is difficult to point out indisputably (how much opinions and conceptions on crime are influenced by media representations and

especially particular newspapers), it is still logical that media plays a role in shaping the surrounding world.

Greer's 2003 collection *Sex Crime and the Media* covers extensively the question: why is crime such a popular topic in the media? What makes crime so newsworthy? From proximity to the reader, novelty of the crime, personalization and dramatization and shock factor there are multiple factors that go into the selection of news topics. Greer rejects the notion that the 'seriousness' of a crime would be the biggest determining factor as to why a particular crime or topic makes it into the pages of a newspaper, emphasizing rather the proximity of the reader to the crime. Proximity refers to obviously geographical proximity, especially in local newspapers crime committed in the area are more likely to be over the news threshold than crimes happening in other areas of the country or other countries. Proximity also refers to the fact that how relatable the crime is, could this happen to me, am I at risk? Fear of crime has been an explanatory factor in a lot of studies concerning crime and the media.

Another of Greer's main arguments is that crime news aim to shock and that is why journalists are on the lookout for cases that are especially gruesome. This could have some explanatory power when looking at the quantitative results and how aggravated rape cases and rape cases with long sentences are overrepresented in the results.

Greer also points out commercialization as a factor. Even though the collection is from 2003 it understands how much the field of journalism will change with money and commercial money especially. As subscription rates go down, paid content online becomes an even more important source for money for newspapers. This has been clear with tabloid press for a long time but large broadsheets are more subject to these changes as their content would need to change in order to keep up with the commercialization of the press. It's clear that this development has an effect on what is reported and how. 'Tabloidization of the press' is a real thing. Greer even suggests that the press manipulates sex crime news to sell more copies (p. 98).

Greer also uses Ireland as an example of how a change in political atmosphere influences sex crime news reporting, but these types of correlations are difficult to lay out empirically.

Bonner (2019) talks about the affect media has on public opinion in the following way:

“Mass media affect public opinion in the sense that they can set the agenda of public debate and thus the issues facing their country that the public are most likely to identify as most important. The issues or stories they choose to place on the front page, in lengthy articles, in large broadcasting segments on television and radio, and disseminate widely through social media, set the agenda regarding what issues the public and political leaders will be talking about.”

The types of rape crime presented or the phenomena surrounding rape crime that newspapers write about is in their own control, they make the decision to publish crimes that have a shock factor, and omit certain types of crimes, they can ask experts of their opinions and publish them, they can quote certain politicians on the topic. Media constructs and creates a framework for understanding crime. And nowadays this image is influenced by the media outlet's idea of what is going to sell. Monod (2017) highlights the media's responsibility in making these choices. There are countless of events and incidents that happen every day, but only a few of them will make the news. There is a process of selection that is guided by a set of news values. Sometimes those values are made explicit (like in the case of Helsingin Sanomat editorials) and sometimes not.

Hyper-medialised rape

Gabriella Nilsson in Bruvik Heinskou, Skilbrei & Stefansen (2020) talks extensively about hyper-medialised group rape cases and how they have affected the legal discourse surrounding rape. Nilsson's article about the highly publicized rape cases is very similar to this master's thesis, as it takes highly publicized cases and assesses their impact on rape crime legislation.

Nilsson looks at several cases of group rape that were highly publicized in the Swedish media from 1995 to 2013. The discourse surrounding these cases introduced the general public to terms like consent and fueled political discussion that eventually led to a consent-based legal definition of rape in Sweden. In Sweden it was the media who created a field for this legal discussion and opinions about the terminology surrounding consent to be introduced into legislation.

The legal shift to the absence of voluntariness as the definition of rape is something that is now after years of discussion about rape crime been presented as a reform also in Finland.

Franko, van der Woude & Barker (2019) reiterate the Nordic countries' position as 'beacons' for tolerant policies when it comes to deviance. In a similar way to this master's thesis they look at the changing political climate as something that has ushered in a harsher penal climate even in the Nordics. Migration policies and the rise of the rightwing anti-immigration movements have influenced the penal climate in Nordic countries. Although their article does not directly look at sex crime, it looks at politics of exclusion as a reason for a harsher penal climate, especially when it comes to immigrants. As this master's thesis will show, a lot of the media coverage of rape crime revolves around cases that included an immigrant as the perpetrator. In this way the politics of immigration and exclusion are embedded in the analysis of sentencing policies and their media coverage.

Moral panics

The term 'moral panic' is often used when there is a sudden eruption of concern about a particular social problem. It reflects how the government, political parties and the general public come to recognize new threats to social order (Cricher, 2003). The media has an undeniable role in shaping the understanding of the world we live in, and thereby the threats that our society faces.

Historically the moral panic theory has been applied to cases that involve children, and at a point in time this dissertation was supposed to include child sexual abuse as well as rape crime committed towards adults as its source of data. Due to a need to narrow the focus only news on sentencing of rape crime were selected. But when doing initial research on the topic and focusing on the way that moral panics can be applied to understanding discourse on social problems, it became apparent that moral panic theory is a useful tool when looking at rape crime and violent crime in general. It also gives a distinct point of view to how the media operates.

The first full definition of moral panics comes in Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1973). Cohen defines the stages of a moral panic as such:

1. something becomes defined as a threat to societal values
2. mass media presents the threat as stylized and stereotypical
3. prominent figures take part in the discussion of the threat
4. experts give their opinion
5. ways of coping are evolved or resorted to
6. the condition disappears.

Often the panic is easily forgotten and subsides as the media picks up another topic of moral outrage. But sometimes it has more profound effects in the form of changes to legal and social policy (p.9).

Another major thinker in moral panics theory is Thompson, who did extensive work in comparing the American sociological definition of moral panics that focused on social constructionism and the British way (Cohen and Hall et al's *Policing the Crisis*). In Thompson's view (in Critcher 2003) the British approach has benefits especially when it comes to taking in to account the role of the mass media in shaping moral panics and their public response.

Although for example Kivivuori, Smolej & Kemppe (2002) criticized that moral panics is a product of its time and does not necessarily bode well now when media has been pluralized and audiences more spread out, this dissertation will argue that since the data is from the largest newspaper in Finland that's reach is undeniable (almost 2 000 000 readers in print and press in 2020), the moral panics theory offers a framework for understanding the trends of news on rape sentencing policies.

The 2015 collection *Revisiting Moral Panics* by Cree, Clapton & Smith shows that the theory still holds explanatory value when it comes to understanding social issues, anxieties and their solutions. Especially the analysis surrounding child sexual abuse and its reporting has benefitted from the moral panic theory. In the beforementioned collection Frank Furedi looks at pedophilia and the moral panic surrounding the phenomenon and points out that moral panic has been a useful tool in shedding light to the important moral dimensions of society's reactions to and perceptions of a problem

(p.207). Referring to Garland (2008) he points out that in the 21st century society has become more heterogenous and different voices and concepts of morality have gained more publicity through a multiplying of channels of expression. Yet Furedi and Garland agree that for example the panic over child sexual abuse is still a 'genuine moral panic' (Garland, 2008, p.17). This thesis will argue that rape crime is also an example of a modern moral panic, especially as it relates to crime committed by immigrants.

Monod (2017) uses Cohen's and Hall et al's ideas to build a model of analyzing media in shaping a moral panic related to crime. "An examination of Cohen's (1972) inventory stage and one of Hall et al.'s (1978) understanding of the structural relationships between the news media and institutional elites illustrates that the media are involved in a panic in three key ways: amplifying a problem, shaping up a folk devil and setting an agenda", Monod states. This model will be used in the analysis of the qualitative data.

The moral panic theory is tightly related to social constructionism as social problems can be seen as being socially constructed. By painting a picture of what rape crime is and what types of people commit rape crime the media is taking a part in socially constructing the world we live in. The media has an active part in defining social problems.

Social constructionism is a theory that states that meanings are created in interaction with others instead of individually.

Moral panics also show that these social constructions often bear little resemblance to reality, as can be later seen when we compare rape crime research and statistics to the socially created image of rape crime by the media.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON RAPE CRIME AND THE MEDIA IN FINLAND

A lot of master's theses and other research have used Helsingin Sanomat as a source of data to look at a multitude of societal phenomena and how they are constructed in the media. Especially crime related topics have been popular, however Mäkelä's thesis on

rape crime reporting in Helsingin Sanomat from 2000 was the latest that looked specifically at the portrayal of rape in the news.

Rape crime and the media

Mäkelä (2000) focused her study on the feminist discourse on rape crime and how rape news are value driven. What was especially interesting was that she found that the disparity between reported rape crimes was far away from reality. Rapists were presented as either regular men that did not mean to rape anyone or violent crazed rapists that ended up in prison thereby creating a picture that didn't match the reality of rape crime: most cases happen at home and the victim and the perpetrator know each other.

Mäkelä's thesis is based on a feminist discourse analysis that finds that the victim's perspective is absent from rape crime reporting and is often suspected with blame for the crime.

Fear of crime and the media

In 2002 Kivivuori, Kemppe and Smolej looked at violent crime in the front pages of daily newspapers in Finland. The study focused on the relationship between the media, crime and fear of crime. This interesting criminological point of view inspired this thesis in the way that crime and how it is portrayed in the media has an impact on how people view and fear crime. Although the correlation between crime news and fear of crime is not straightforward, it is interesting to see how they do indeed reflect one another. Their main finding was that violent crime was more prevalent on the front pages of Finnish media outlets. At the same time levels of violent crime had not changed much numerically but it is possible that the nature of violent crime had become more diverse and now included organized violent crime and crime committed by young people. These changes however did not reflect the same changes as the increasing prevalence of violent crime in the front pages of Finnish media outlets nor the fear of crime that had also increased in the same time period to the same extent.

The problem with Kivivuori, Kemppe and Smolej's study is that they cannot undeniably show that the increase in violent crime in the news causes the increase in fear of crime. A similar dilemma will be discussed later when it comes to this thesis: is it possible to

show undeniably that media representations of rape crime impact public opinion and politics and thereby legislation.

Näsi et al. returned to this topic in 2020 with the idea that the media landscape had changed significantly in the past 20 years. Still it showed that traditional media is the main source for violent crime news consumption, social media just has added more ways for people to perceive news about violent crime thereby creating a paradox.

Here is a direct quote from Näsi et al. :

“Our overall findings are somewhat alarming in the sense that Finland, for example, has in fact seen notable reduction of many traditional forms of crime over recent decades. - Therefore, there appears to be a paradox of sorts, as news and information content about violent crime has never been so extensive, yet at the same time youth delinquency (Anonymous citation, 2016) and homicide (Lehti et al., 2019) have hit all-time lows in Finland. Despite the actual trends in crime, news and information about crime continues to sell, therefore the paradox remains. In fact, in Finland 70% of respondents report perceiving that violence in Finland has increased over the past few years (Anonymized citation, 2018).”

Tiina Malin wrote in Haaste in 2019 about how following new types of alternative media outlets had a strong correlation between fear of crime and the conception of violent crime increasing forcefully, even more so than with traditional media. Especially those who were interested in crime news, had income challenges, had previously been victims of violent crimes, were female, young and highly educated had higher levels of fear of crime. Although traditional media also has an impact, ‘fake news’ and social media related to fear of crime even more.

The studies conducted on the relationship between fear of crime and the media show that there is a huge disparity in the image that media creates about crime and actual crime levels.

Racism and the media

Saresma’s 2019 essay into the Kempele rape case is very illuminating when it comes to the effects of racism on media. Focusing on the 2015 rape case that involved two young

immigrants that were accused of the rape of a 14 year old in Northern Finland the study reflects upon gendered violence, racialized rape and the affective politics of fear.

Pointing out the contradiction between the high prevalence of violent against women by men and the position of Finland as one of the most equal countries in the world, Saresma argues that especially household violence and rape is a taboo in Finland. As this dissertation will show, the media discussion about rape has been highly impacted and fueled by immigration and perpetrators that have an immigrant background, a statement that Saresma's findings also support.

Saresma situates the media discourse of rape in the framework of the politics of fear. She quotes Sara Ahmed saying that "fear has been at the forefront of media discussions since 9/11" and Ruth Wodak who has examined the division of people in categories us vs. them and the creation of threats. This us vs them division can be seen in Saresma's view in the threat that the refugee crisis was presented in, and how it created this racialized other that is immigrants and asylum seekers.

RAPE CRIME: REPORTING, LEGISLATION AND SENTENCING IN FINLAND

Ojala's (2014) book "Seksuaalirikokset" (Sex crime) goes through the different types of sex crimes in Finland. This master's thesis focuses on rape and aggravated rape (raiskaus and törkeä raiskaus), but the legislation also includes sexual abuse (seksuaalinen hyväksikäyttö) and used to include forcing a sexual act (pakottaminen seksuaaliseen tekoon) until 2014 when it was removed as a separate categorization. These crimes are written down in the Finnish criminal law chapter 20 and section 2 (RL 20:1 and 2§) on rape crime.

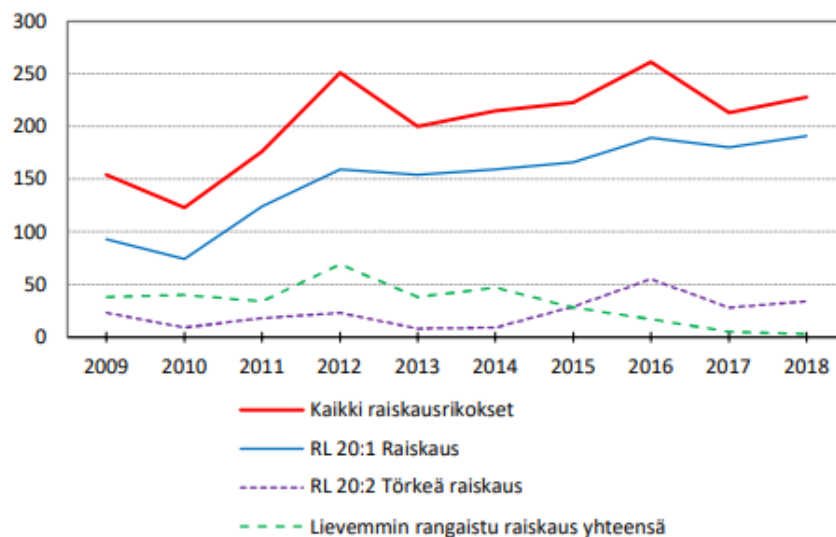
The 2014 change in legislation was a result of multiple parliamentary discussions about lenient sentencing (Eduskunta 2014).

Rape is a difficult crime to measure as most rapes are not reported to the police. This is shown through comparing the national victim survey results to police statistics. And

although reporting rates are on the rise, the majority of rape crimes are still not reported to the police (Rikollisuuskatsaus 2018).

The amounts of rape reported has doubled from 2009 to 2018. Reported aggravated rapes have tripled in 2015-2019 (Rikollisuuskatsaus 2018).

These developments can also be seen in sentencing. The following graph is borrowed from Seuraamusjärjestelmä 2018, an overlook of sentencing and imprisonment in Finland that shows the development of rape sentences (raiskaus) and aggravated rape sentences (törkeä raiskaus). Both figures have gone up since 2010 with a spike in aggravated rape sentences in 2016.



Kuvio 4 Raiskausrikostuomiot vuosina 2009–2018, kaikki syyksi luetut rikokset

Despite changes in legislation throughout the 2010's rape sentences have remained steady. The sentence lengths will be reflected upon in the following methodology and findings section.

METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

This chapter will look at the reasoning behind choosing a mixed methods approach to studying rape crime news through quantitative and content analysis. It will also go through the data collection methods and different types of data collected, the quantitative data on news pieces about rape crime sentence lengths and the qualitative data about the articles and editorials that form a larger discussion about rape crime sentencing policy.

A mixed methods approach to content analysis

According to Bryman (2012) content analysis is “an approach to the analysis of documents and texts that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner”.

The main reason this part of the study was conducted through a content analysis, was to account for longitudinal changes. The aim of these dissertation is not only to see how rape crime is represented in the news, but also how those representations have changed throughout the years. A 15-year timeline was chosen to look at trends and changes in rape crime news in Helsingin Sanomat. Bryman (2012) suggests that content analysis is a suitable method for researching change, and does so with “relative ease”(p.304). Bryman particularly mentions “changes in emphasis in crime reporting in newspapers” (p.304) as an area of study that can benefit from content analysis. A longer timeline would have given a more clear image of the changes in reporting, but due to the researcher’s time constraints a 15-year period was considered to be a long enough period to identify trends and changes and reflect them with the changes in Finnish sentencing policy and punitive levels.

Content analysis is also a very transparent method (Bryman, 2012, p.304): as the coding scheme and exact categorizations of the quantitative data are laid out in the methodology and appendix listings, the quantitative analysis can be replicated with the same newspaper, covering a different time period or used as a model for a comparative study if applied to a different publication in Finland or another country.

Content analysis, defined by Webb et al. (1966), is an unobtrusive method that offers multiple benefits for a master’s thesis. One of those is that there is no need to go

through the ethical approval process as there are no participants (a non-reactive method), and thereby no possible harm is inflicted on any research participants, as the data is derived from a newspaper. The method is also relatively simple and not time consuming to use.

As opposed to keeping only to a quantitative perspective, it was felt that a qualitative approach would offer a deeper understanding of the representations of sentencing principles; quantifying value discussions or locating themes emergent from the data would have been impossible without a qualitative reflection of the data. According to Krippendorff (2002) even large amounts of quantitative data don't lead to the "most obvious conclusions that .. would draw from qualitative interpretations of textual data. Qualitative analyses can be systematic, reliable and valid as well" (p.10).

It was clear that the quantitative data would only allow a shallow analysis of rape crime news. As this is a sociological master's thesis it is important to look at not just the frequency and type of rape crime sentencing news but also the discussion that surround the trends in the quantitative data. The quantitative data can be seen as the skeleton and the qualitative data as the meat on the bones of this master's thesis. This is called an explanatory mixed methods design where the qualitative data's purpose is to build upon or aid in further understanding upon the preliminary quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p.71).

The phases of this explanatory method according to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) is to first to collect and analyze the quantitative data and the follow up with the collection and analysis of the qualitative data based on the main findings from the quantitative data. This way the qualitative findings connect with the quantitative findings, in the case of this thesis build upon the types and trends in news on rape crime sentences to gain a better picture of the discussion surrounding the changes in quantitative data. Particular strengths of this design type are that it is simple to implement because of its two phase design and it gives structure to the data analysis as the building blocks from the quantitative data are laid out first and followed by the wider qualitative analysis of a separate data set that is chosen with the help of the first results. It also allows for a longer multiphase study that always reflects upon the previous results from the data analysis.

If this mixed methods explanatory model would be used with a group of people, the two phase process could pose some challenges with data collection as the particular questions that will be explored in the second phase would not be yet clear, but as this master's thesis focuses on newspaper data it works excellently as the same source of data for the same timeline will be accessible later on as well.

The data set also is easy to manage because it does not include any research participants that would require a larger ethical review process. The topic in itself is sensitive, and thereby when the results are discussed it's important to let the listeners know that the topic of this master's thesis might be triggering to some.

The quantitative data also includes names of perpetrators. There is of course an assumption that Helsingin Sanomat follows the Finnish Journalistic Alliance guidelines when releasing these names to the public, and there is indeed a reason for that (considered a public threat?), but none of the names will be repeated in this context as it is not clear why some names were reported and some names were not. The addition of any names of the convicted rapists would not add any value to the analysis of the data.

Qualitative content analysis

After inspecting different types of qualitative content analysis, an inductive approach to content analysis was adopted. The method is based on a flexible form of analysis, where themes are allowed to emerge from the data. An inductive approach was chosen instead of a deductive one because even though this thesis was to inspect rape crime news from a particular perspective (whether they agree with the Nordic exceptionalism theory) it was felt that's important to not only look at the data from a particular perspective, but allow themes to emerge from the data. One of the themes that emerged from the qualitative (and the quantitative) data was the discussion about foreign background perpetrators. This was a theme that changed the whole theoretical framework of the study to include moral panic theory. This is a great example why it is important to let the themes emerge from the data. Although the initial quantitative findings gave a mission of needing to understand the larger picture and discussions surrounding rape

sentence news, the researcher felt it was important that the collected qualitative data to speak for itself, instead of only looking for particular things deductively in the data.

Analyzing qualitative data

There are multiple branches of qualitative content analysis, including discourse analysis. As Wooffitt (2008) describes the discourse analysis method and how it is “concerned to analyse how social and political inequalities are manifest in and reproduced through discourse” (p.448), this dissertation wanted to use a similar approach in qualitative content analysis form; representations of rape sentencing principles were looked at through a social constructionist lense, the articles and editorials create a picture of social and political issues that are reproduced through media representations.

In a qualitative research approach there’s always a danger for the researcher to let pre-existing ideas of the topic to influence data collection, but as the search scope was already quite narrow (searching for articles solely on domestic commentaries of the nature of rape sentencing policy) there was little room for exclusion or misrepresentation based on solely the researchers own perspective, the data seems valid then as it encompasses all articles that in any form look into rape crime sentencing, whether it is an article about changes in the law or an editorial about the values surrounding sentencing policy. Of course the categorization process and the interpretation of the text is always influenced by the researcher’s own point of view, especially when there are pre-existing notions based on the quantitative data that the researcher is looking for. There is a need to understand this researcher bias and make it work regardless to keep the findings objective.

By combining a qualitative and quantitative approach the data could be looked at from multiple perspectives, and the analysis drawn from the leading articles of a qualitative nature, could be supported with a replicable, quantitative method.

Data

The data for this master's thesis will focus on news, articles and editorials about rape crime sentences from Finland.

The data set will not include cases that:

- mention other types of sex crime including child sex abuse, honour killings, prostitution, false reports of rape or cases that also mention a murder
- did not happen in Finland
- do not mention of a sentence (f.e. the police are looking for a man suspected of rape, or statistics about crime levels)
- articles related to honour killings
- are from the opinion section.

These guidelines were made to keep the data manageable and focus solely on the discussion about rape crime sentencing instead of sex crime as a phenomenon in itself.

The data was collected from the online resources of Helsingin Sanomat (Arkisto) that includes all news articles since 1990 through the use of different search terms and their variations (rape/raiskaus, seksuaalirikos/sex crime). The data was collected from January 2005 until October 2020. This larger timeline aims to depict changes in longitudinal data as one of the aims of this thesis is to show changes in the news reporting of rape crime sentencing.

The pieces of news that were gathered for quantitative analysis were news pieces that mentioned a sentence for a particular rape crime. Most often these pieces of news follow a similar pattern: a sentence for a rape crime has been given, these were the circumstances and this is the sentence length given. The pieces of news differ from the articles and editorials, because there is no connection to surrounding discussions about social issues or other phenomena.

These pieces of news were put into an Excel that catalogues the date of publication, the title of the piece of news, the crime committed (rape/aggravated rape), gender of the perpetrator, the age of the perpetrator, their relation to the victim (whether they knew the victim before the day of the rape or not, known/unknown), the gender of the victim, the age of the victim, the victim's relationship to the perpetrator (whether they knew

the rapist before the day of the rape/aggravated rape), the length of the sentence, the area where the crime happened, whether the perpetrators name was mentioned and whether that name was Finnish or foreign.

These pieces of news were chosen to gain a clearer image of how rape crime is represented in Helsingin Sanomat. The main goal of the data is to paint a picture of what rape crime looks like in Finland according to the largest daily newspaper in Finland. This is done in order to reflect the image created by the newspaper to real crime. The main findings of the quantitative data are reflected with accurate crime statistics.

The quantitative data aims to answer the following research questions:

- how has news reporting on rape crime developed in the largest newspaper in Finland (Helsingin sanomat) over the past fifteen (15) years
- what types of quantitative and qualitative trends can be found in the media coverage and discourse on rape crime sentencing
- how does the news reporting of rape crime reflect 'real crime'.

Quantitative findings

AMOUNT OF RAPE NEWS, ARTICLES AND EDITORIALS

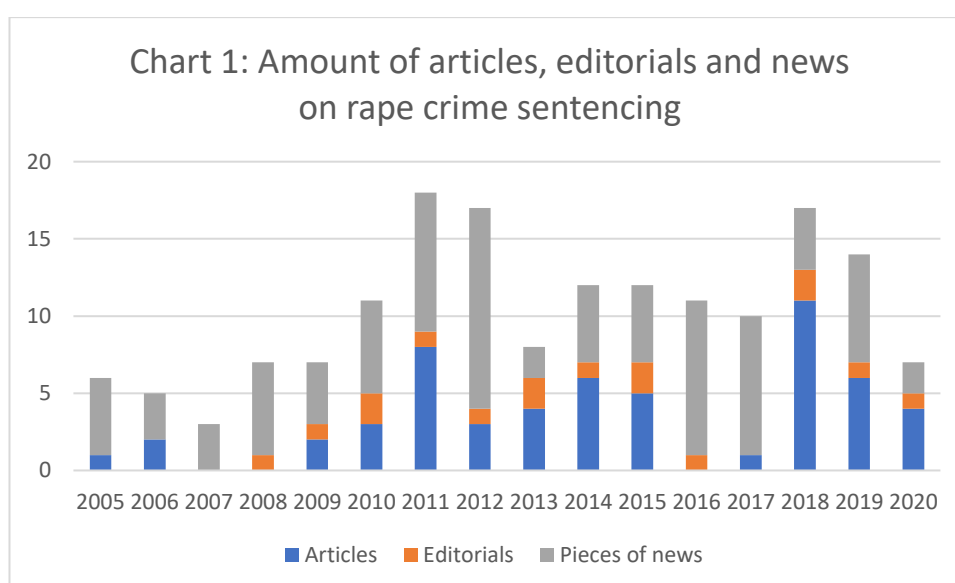


Chart 1 depicts the amount of articles, editorials and news pieces on rape crime sentences between 2005 and 2020. It would appear that although less prevalent in 2005 to 2009 rape crime is a topic of discussion that is rarely absent from Helsingin Sanomat. The amount of media coverage for rape crime fluctuates by year and the highest peaks are related to certain discourses. The peaks often relate to years where there are explanatory discussions about rape crime sentencing which will be analyzed further in the qualitative findings section.

News coverage is often centered around a few prolific cases that gained a lot of media attention. In 2009 the lessening of a police officer's sentence sparked a discussion about lenient sentencing and values that lasted for a couple of years, which would explain the high levels of pieces of news that include a rape sentence as well.

In 2015 a discussion about rapists with immigrant backgrounds sparked another discussion explains the high number of pieces of news about sentences in 2016 and 2017. In 2016 and 2017 19 rape crime sentences were written about in Helsingin Sanomat, out of the 19 news pieces in 17 a name was mentioned. In those 17 pieces of news the name of the perpetrator was foreign. That is 100%.

2018 was the aftermath of the Metoo-movement and changes in legislation, Suostumus 2018 was a citizen's initiative that aims to make the rape legislation in Finland consent based instead of force-based legislation. Most of the editorials and articles relate to that. The consent based legislation would help with getting higher reporting rates and more prosecutions started.

WHAT TYPE OF RAPE IS PRESENTED?

The data includes 72 rape sentences (69,9%) and 31 aggravated rape sentences (30,1%).

In 2015 to 2019 the amount of aggravated rapes reported to the police was 11-15% of all rapes, whereas in 2010 to 2014 it was between 3-5% (Rikollisuustilanne 2018). Reportrates are of course not the same as sentences, as it can be speculated that the more severe the crime the more physical evidence there will be of it.

In addition rape is a crime type that has the lowest report rate to the police due to a multitude of factors including shame, fear of the judicial system taking too long or not believing you and that the perpetrator is someone you know.

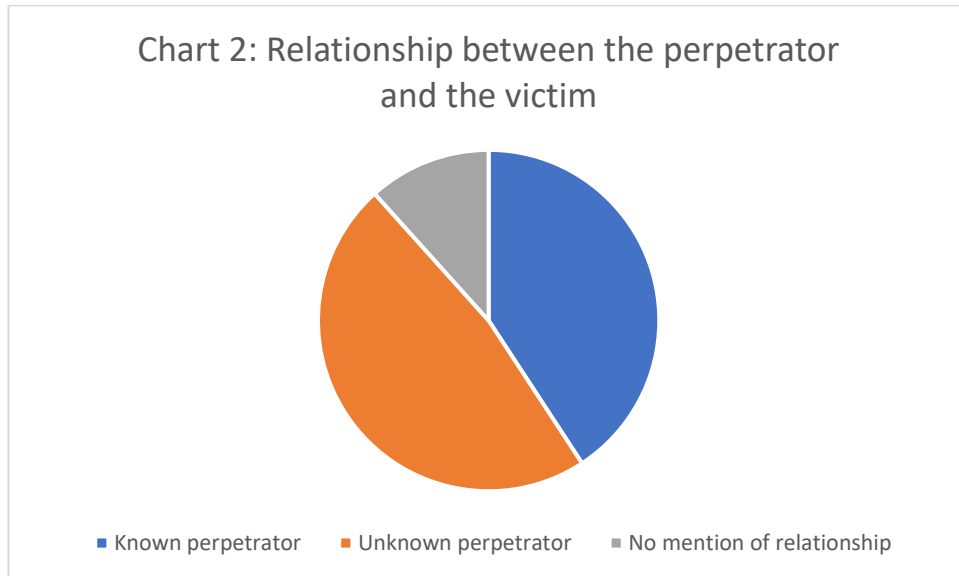


Chart 2 shows the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. This means that the perpetrator is unknown if the rapist didn't know the victim before the day of the attack. In 47,6 % of the pieces of news the perpetrator did not know the victim.

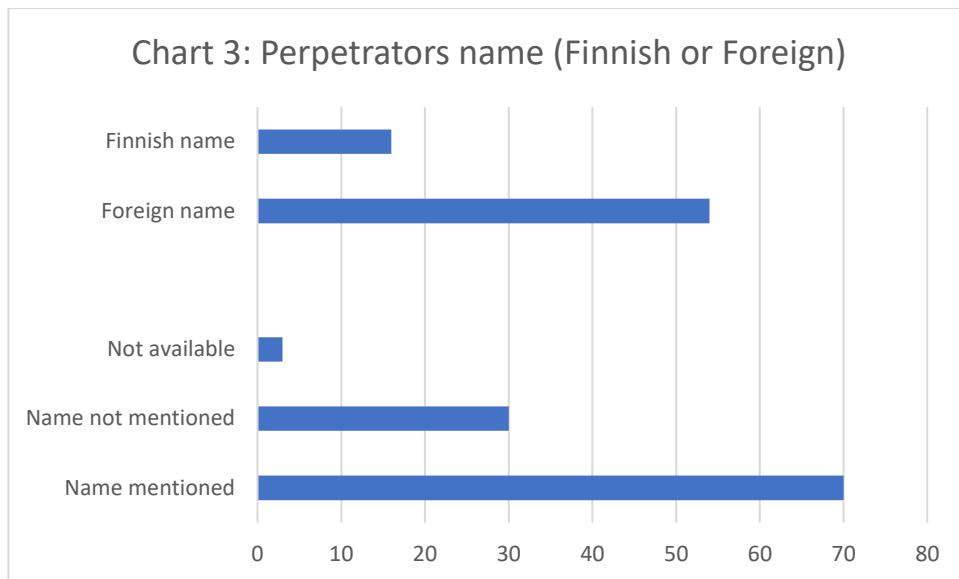
These figures show a misrepresentation of unknown perpetrators that cover over half of the perpetrator/victim relations mentioned. Rikollisuustilanne 2018 quotes Tapio-Lappi Seppälä's 2012 study of the relationships between the rapist and the victim. In that study only 17% of rape crimes were committed by an unknown perpetrator. Most rapists are either the victim's spouse (35 %) or friend/acquaintance/relative (30%) or a casual acquaintance.

This misrepresentation gives the public a misconstrued image of rape crime in general: the newspaper creates an illusion of the proficiency of a particular type of perpetrator that in reality is not as common. Most rapes happen by someone you know and at home.

WHO IS A RAPIST?

According to the data rapists are male. 99% of the perpetrators are male, 1% female.

In reality 99,6 % of rapists are male, and 97% of the victims are female (Rikollisuustilanne 2018). Rape is a gendered crime and this is very prominent also in the reporting of rape crime sentences.



The name of the perpetrator was mentioned in 70 pieces of news. Out of those mentions 77,1% were foreign names. As mentioned before 17 out of 19 cases in 2016 and 2017 mentioned a foreign name as the rapist, the two other cases did not mention a name.

In 2017 and 2018 all together 1284 rape crimes were brought to the attention of the Finnish police. Of those rape crimes 286 rape crimes, 22,2%, were committed by foreign citizens (Statistics Finland, 2019). As Finnish is such a distinct language it's easy to make the difference between a Finnish name and a name of non-Finnish origin, a non-Finnish name does not necessarily correlate with a non-Finnish citizenship. But as the difference between the mentioned names (77%) and suspected perpetrators (22%) is so vast, it is clear that the media overrepresents crimes that were committed by people with a foreign background.

Rikollisuustilanne 2019 also includes in its data second generation immigrants and that puts certain years' percentage of foreign background perpetrators very high, for example in 2010 it was 45% and in 2019 those with a foreign background were 9 times as likely to commit rape than those with a Finnish background.

There are possible explanations for this

- young age of the population with a foreign background and socio economic status was studied as explanatory reasons, when they were standardized those with a foreign background were 6 times more likely to commit rape crimes (Rikollisuuskatsaus 2019)

- as crimes committed by unknown perpetrators are more common in Helsingin Sanomat, it's possible that those with a foreign background commit more crimes against victims that they don't know, but I could not find a statistic to support this hypothesis
- it's possible that those with a foreign background commit more severe forms of rape (aggravated rape), but the Statistics Finland database does not separate rape and aggravated rape
- there are cultural factors involved, this would be an interesting topic of study.

Some of the news pieces specify that the name of the perpetrator is not included to protect the victim's identity, that's why the majority of those cases that did not mention the name are crimes committed by a known perpetrator.

The overrepresentation of foreign background names is an interesting finding and will be explored more with the qualitative data.

SENTENCE LENGTHS

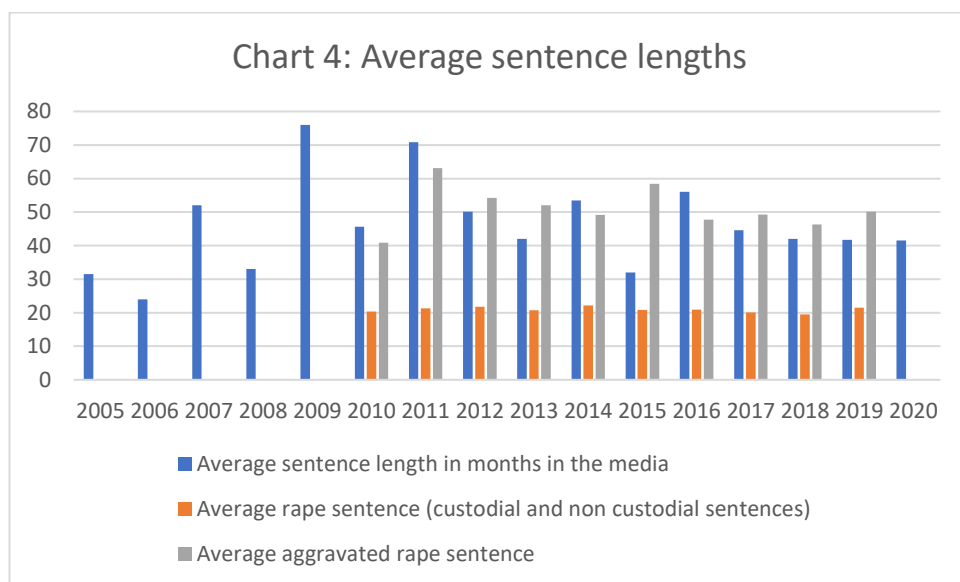


Chart 4 shows the average sentence length in the news pieces in Helsingin Sanomat, and the actual average lengths for rape and aggravated rape. Out of 103 cases in the pieces

of news 11 ended in a non custodial (probational) sentence and 6 in an acquittal. The average lengths in Chart 4 are from Statistics Finland (2015-2019) and Houtsonen & Kaaselainen (2017).

These quantitative results show that the image presented about rape crime in Helsingin Sanomat does not reflect the reality of rape crime sentencing. One third of cases reported in Helsingin Sanomat are aggravated rapes, yet in most years the average sentence is nearly identical to the average rape sentence for aggravated rape. The cases that Helsingin Sanomat chooses to report are cases that have a higher sentence than normal and are more extreme cases than the average rape crime.

Rikollisuustilanne 2019 was published a week before this thesis was due, but after inspection the figures were not dramatically different (except for the foreign background) to the one's from the year before so they serve the same explanatory purpose and were not changed.

SUMMARY

These quantitative findings show that the image of rape crime that is presented in the news doesn't reflect the reality of rape crime especially when it comes to the type of perpetrators (their relationship to the victim and their foreign background). The overrepresentation of longer sentence lengths reflects that more severe types of rape crime are presented in the media, the typical rape case which is the most common (known assailant at home) is not something that breaks the news barrier. Although there are multiple sources where people gather information from about crime, a newspaper with a reliable reputation and around 2 million daily readers has an undeniable influence in impacting the image people have about rape crime in general.

The quantitative findings don't by themselves tell much sociologically, therefore it was important to also analyze the articles and editorials about rape crime sentencing in a more qualitative way. This helps with situating the pieces of news about rape crime sentences in a larger social context.

Qualitative findings

The qualitative data is based on the editorials or leading articles (n=16) and larger articles about rape crime sentencing (n=55). The articles are most often either progress reports about rape crime sentencing policies and their changes or more investigative looks about phenomena surrounding rape crime, often relying heavily upon statistics.

The editorials or leading articles are short statements by Helsingin Sanomat on current events, they often include a call to action or a question for politicians.

The qualitative data was gathered using the same Helsingin Sanomat archive as the quantitative data, using the same keywords and their variations (raiskaus/rape and seksuaalirikos/sex crime).

After the data was collected it was meticulously looked through to find four main emerging themes that all the articles and editorials fell under:

lenient sentencing and value discussions, immigrants as a threat, statistics about rape crime, and consent-based legislation.

It was surprising that all the articles and editorials fit into only four distinct categories. It shows that a) the discussion surrounding rape crime sentencing hasn't significantly transformed or changed in the time period of the data collection, as especially the lenient sentencing discussion continue throughout the 15 year data set and b) the topic of rape crime sentencing is discussed in narrow settings and not from many different angles.

Numerically the most popular articles and editorials discussed the punitive levels in Finland ie. the lengths of sentences. The discussion about consent-based legislation is a fairly new phenomenon, present in the data for the first time in 2017. A lot of the discussion about immigrants as a threat surrounded suspected cases and did not involve sentence lengths, so some of the discussion about immigrants as a threat to the safety of Finnish women is absent from this data set, but would be an extremely interesting research topic on its own: how are immigrants presented as criminals in the Finnish media?

In the following chapter we will go through these themes in the light of the thesis' sociological theoretical framework. This chapter aims to answer the following research questions:

- are there penal populist tendencies in the coverage of rape crime sentencing
- are there reflections of moral panics in the coverage of rape crime sentencing.

LENIENT SENTENCING AND VALUE DISCUSSIONS

This section looks at the editorials and articles that were categorized as being a part of the theme *lenient sentencing and value discussions* and reflects it with Pratt's penal populism theory.

Pratt's (2007) definition of a penal populist driven society is based on a multitude of factors: the decline of trust in government, discrediting expertise, sensational rather than objective media reporting and the politicization of victimhood associated with such developments are indicators of a legal policy turning to penal populism. The following chapter looks especially at the editorials or leading articles from Helsingin Sanomat and whether they show signs of penal populism.

As described in the introduction of this dissertation, the Finnish term 'arvokeskustelu', that translates to 'value discussion' or 'discussion on values', has been a prominent term in political discussions since 2010 in particular in relation to the 2011 parliamentary elections and the 2012 presidential election. And as the political party 'True Finns' introduced crime policy in their election campaign, sentencing principles of rape and the levels of punishment have been included in these value discussions.

This change in the tone of discourse is notable in the Leading Articles in the decade and emerges for the first time in 2010. And although sentencing principles and the victim's perspective have been visible in earlier articles and editorials, they do not explicitly mention values. It is evident that questions of what lenient sentences say about Finnish society emerged in the editorials and articles:

"Fundamentally the question relates to values and attitudes. The assumption that being raped is at least partly the victim's fault lives on in Finland. It's seen that the

victim has given permission for sexual intercourse, if they haven't been able to defend themselves enough."

Editorial 11: Rape is a heavy crime (20.7. 2012)

"Fundamentally it is about values and attitudes. A notion that being raped is at least partly the victim's fault is still prevalent in Finland. Especially young women get blamed for f.e. dressing too provocatively or walking the streets at night."

Editorial 12: Rape sentences reflect values (12.7.2011)

"The sentences for sex crimes always gain attention because the public's sense of justice see them as too lenient."

Editorial 15: More information about sex sentences (18.1.2008)

By introducing values into the discussion about penal policy and sentencing and highlighting the victim's perspective the media "speaks irresistibly to the emotional and moral dispositions" of the public (Sparks, 2000, p.101). Linking the discussion on sentencing principles of rape to a larger societal discussion on what is valuable in Finnish society and what values we are presenting to the world as a supposedly equitable nation has an impact on how people perceive rape crime sentencing: as value based. Lenient sentences indicate a lack of values or a presence of wrong values.

Rape is an evil act, that strips another person of the right to their own body. It leaves the victim with deep scars, that are not visible from the outside. Recovery takes time.

Article 55: Rape can be seen with different eyes (19.11. 2011)

"A rapist's short sentence insults the victim that has been wounded with a crime. It adds mental suffering and feelings of worthlessness. A lenient sentence is a reflection of society's stance."

Article 44: A rapist tears the victim apart (10.7.2011)

The victim's rights are brought to the fore front of the discussion, multiple articles and editorials talk about how evil rape is or how deep rooted and long standing the consequences of it are. This seems to be a development that has happened during the

period researched in this thesis as Mäkelä (2000) found that the victim is barely mentioned in news articles about rape in Helsingin Sanomat and often even blamed for the crime, whereas the perpetrator is either a rapist by accident or a crazed criminal. This move towards value discussions and focusing on the perspective of the victim can be seen as an important development and is a discussion worth having, especially in the light of Mäkelä's findings.

Pratt's penal populism mentions sensational rather than objective media reporting as a sign of penal populism. It is difficult to evaluate what is meant by sensationalism and how these articles, editorials and news pieces could reflect those tendencies.

Pratt (2007) states that as "crime analysis become personalized rather than based on statistics, as it privileges the experiences of ordinary people, particularly crime victims" (p.67) the public are suspect to sensationalizing perspectives. This personalization mostly refers to tabloid-type news that are written from the victim's perspective, where they tell their life stories and how terrible the crime committed against them was. This happens especially when there are children missing or have been killed, they juxtapose the innocence of the child with the horrendousness of the crime. With rape these types of stories are rare due to the sensitiveness of the crime and possibly the history of blaming the victim. These types of victim profiles are absent from the data.

The quantitative data showed that Helsingin Sanomat reports rape crime news that do not reflect the reality of rape crime. It would seem that more rare and more extreme cases are the ones that are being reported. This can be seen as a sign of sensationalist reporting: cases that have longer sentences are more severe and involve more violence, cases where the perpetrator is unknown to the victim are more dangerous because they could happen to anyone and cases that involve those with an immigrant background fuel a lot of conversation on social media due to the current political atmosphere (True Finns and their anti-immigration discussions).

CONSENT-BASED LEGISLATION AND THE ME TOO-MOVEMENT

From 2017 onwards the discussion about rape crime sentencing has shifted almost entirely towards a new perspective: the discussion surrounding consent-based legislation of rape crime.

The Me too-social media campaign that sparked a social movement against sexual harassment is not really visible in the data in its beginning as the discussion did not focus at the time on rape crime sentencing policy, but rather public figures that had misused their power and committed sex crimes.

In 2018 there is a surge in articles surrounding the Suostumus 2018 (Consent 2018) citizen's initiative.

"A change in legislation that takes into account the absence of voluntariness as a definition of rape instead of violence and its threat is being proposed in Finland following the Swedish model."

Article 2: Rape sentences nearly doubled in Sweden after a legal change – will this happen soon in Finland? (4.7.2020)

"This clarification of the definition of rape would be a clear message for the victims of rape. Nobody's right to self-determination should be messed with without consent."

Editorial 1: Every rape is one too many: sex needs consent (8.7.2020)

Article 16: This is how simple it is: Rape is not sex (15.3. 2018)

The discussion about victim's rights is also prominent when it comes to the discussion about legislative changes towards a consent-based definition of rape. The longstanding discussion about victim's rights that has been prevalent in the media discussions about lenient sentencing is becoming more concrete with the introduction of this new legislative change. It remains to be seen whether the law is indeed passed. This would be a big shift in Finnish penal policy that would have been clearly aided by public opinion, the Me too-movement and a change in the political atmosphere. The success of this law proposal will be highly dependent on whether it gains traction in the more moderate

and conservative parties. The left wing (which has a slight majority in the Finnish parliament) is behind the legislative change proposal.

Helsingin Sanomat also conducted a survey (Article 6) about the public opinion on consent-based legislation, finding that a clear majority of Finns support this legislative change.

The parliamentary discussion on consent has been highly publicized. In article 4 the leader of the right wing Finns Jussi Halla-Aho is quoted as saying “The way rape is defined, is not the biggest issue when it comes to sex crime”, referring to too lenient sentencing as a more urgent issue to attend to, a stance that he has had ever since he entered the political sphere. Halla-Aho has been vocal about problems surrounding immigration and rape crimes committed by immigrants for a long time.

Compared to previous studies (Mäkelä 2000) the data set sees a big change in how the victim is presented, victims right are at the forefront and there are no signs of victim blaming.

IMMIGRANTS AS A THREAT

The theme that became most interesting to study after the initial quantitative findings was the overrepresentation of immigrants as perpetrators of rape crime. Especially after the 2015 Tapanila and Kempele rape cases Helsingin Sanomat focused almost exclusively on rape crime committed by those with a foreign background, excluding all cases that involved a perpetrator with a Finnish name from publication in 2016 and 2017. The Kempele rape case even prompted a ‘crisis meeting’ that was organized by the then prime minister Juha Sipilä in 2015 (Article 22).

The Tapanila case in 2015 sparked media discussions and exploded in social media because three men of a Somali background raped an unknown woman after a train ride. Without going into further detail about the case and the details of the rape, there were multiple articles in the data that discussed the non-custodial sentence given for the crime. Some articles were based on expert opinions of how rape crime sentencing works in Finland and what are the definitions of rape and aggravated rape, but some editorials took prominent stands against the threat immigrants pose to women.

“The phenomenon has changed as a result of the internet and the changed immigration situation.”

“Adult men grooming young girls online has been a growing problem since 2015 when a large amount of asylum seekers entered Finland”

Editorial 2: Adults rarely have an idea how the modern world exposes children and young people as targets of sex crime (14.1.2019)

This editorial also talks about children but as it also relates to young girls over the age of sixteen, and is because of that included in this data set. The editorial clearly states that the main threat for sex crime against young girls is due to immigrants and has become a new phenomenon in Finland ever since 2015 when there was a large influx of asylum seekers in Finland due to the refugee crisis. It would appear that this editorial is not really based on fact or statistics but a fear for young girls' safety. Especially girls and children are victims of known perpetrators and family members. According to Rikollisuustilanne 2019 only 13 % of child victims did not know the assailant beforehand.

“According to the police out of 14 rapes committed in public spaces in Helsinki, 3 are suspected to been done by asylum seekers. In addition Ilta-Sanomat said on Wednesday that in the whole country there is around 100 cases of sexual assault or harassment where the suspects are asylum seekers.

Asylum seeker's sex crime suspicions should not be downplayed. They need to be taken care of strictly and one needs to go into reception centers to make clear what Finnish customs and laws are.

You can tell by the experiences of women that this sexual violence directed at them is not only this fall's phenomenon. This type of violence should gain more attention in general.”

Editorial 6: Violence against women needs more attention (3.2.2015)

This editorial cites statistics given by the police but discredits them as “downplaying” asylum seeker's crime suspicions. It also suggests that asylum seekers do not abide by Finnish customs or laws and that foreign background offenders have been a long standing problem in Finland that doesn't get enough attention.

Although moral panic theory has been criticized in the modern context as media is more diverse now the quantitative and qualitative findings would suggest that there is a moral panic surrounding foreign background perpetrators in the discussion about rape crime in Helsingin Sanomat. The fact that for years Helsingin Sanomat did not release any news about rape crimes that didn't include a foreign named perpetrator creates an image that rape crime has become a phenomenon that solely concerns immigrants and people with a foreign background.

Drawing on Cohen's moral panic model Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) made a model that lays a basis for how social problems are defined. They mention five characteristics of moral panics (quoted in Messick and Aranda 2020):

- concern, where concern arises around a certain group
- hostility, there is a heightened level of hostility towards deviants
- consensus, where a consensus about the reality and seriousness of a threat can be found
- disproportionality, where public concern is in excess of what it 'should' be
- volatility, the panic occurs temporarily and then is forgotten although it might pop up again.

A lot of these categorizations apply here. There is definitely a concern against immigrants committing rape crime, some of the editorials and articles seem to be hostile against all immigrants by associating sexual harassment and rape crime as a problem that has been caused by immigrants. The consensus aspect is not something that can be only addressed with one newspaper's data, but even the editorials and articles show contradicting points of view (f.e Editorial 6 vs Editorial 7). Real crime levels show that not all rape crimes reported to police are committed by immigrants, and if we take into consideration all the crimes that go underreported it's possible that number is even lower. Statistics do show that those with an immigrant background are overrepresented compared to the 'Finnish' population. The discussion surrounding rape crime committed by those with immigrant backgrounds do seem to come and go based on highly publicized cases.

A larger analysis of multiple newspapers, social media conversations and other media would be extremely interesting on this topic.

The voice of Helsingin Sanomat is not solely one sided. One of the editorials presents an alternate perspective.

“A majority of girls and women know from experience that Finnish men too follow strange women, touch them inappropriately and do all the things that asylum seekers are now said to do, writes Hanna Mahlamäki.

Finns do it too. --- It’s wrong against victims that were subjected to crime by Finnish sex offenders that only asylum’s seekers actions cause a state of alarm.”

Editorial 7: It’s wrong against sex crime victims that only the act of a perpetrator with a foreign background causes alarm (29.11. 2015)

This editorial summarizes well the main problems found in the quantitative and qualitative data. The pieces of news, editorials and articles, although reflect public concerns, do not represent the reality of rape crime or its sentencing.

Monod (2017) laid out three stages that media is involved in creating a moral panic: amplifying a problem, shaping up a folk devil and setting an agenda.

An event or happening is amplified and made to appear bigger and of more significance than it actually is or was by way of several practices.

The quantitative findings show that those with a foreign background name are overrepresented in the Helsingin Sanomat, as far as there are a few years when the newspaper focused solely on crimes committed by immigrants, ignoring the reality and majority of rape crime. In the qualitative data some of the editorials explicitly state that sexual harassment and sexual assault are social problems that have been ushered in by the influx of asylum seekers.

Locating and shaping up a folk devil serve to refine the nature of the threat and allow audiences to assess the suitability of proposed remedies.

The longstanding discussions about rape crime sentences being too lenient have rarely included any analysis of why rapists rape, instead the focus has been on how it affects

the victim's life and how sentence lengths reflect values. The refugee crisis offered a so called 'villain', asylum seekers and immigrant background perpetrators. With the disproportionate reporting of rape crimes committed by immigrants Helsingin Sanomat creates an image that rapists are mostly immigrants, creating a divide.

Setting an agenda is achieved by defining what the nature of the threat is and by 'calling for action', often a particular action.

A lot of the editorials called actively for longer sentence lengths and a few of them explicitly blamed immigrants for bringing sexual harassment as a social problem to Finland.

SUMMARY

Throughout the 15-year time period there are multiple signs of both penal populism and moral panics in the qualitative data gathered about rape crime sentencing editorials and articles. The editorials take clear stances against the lenient sentencing in Finland and create immigrants as villains. They do include expert opinions and statistics but only represent crimes that had long sentences, crime that were peculiar and had a shock factor in the form of younger victims or unknown victims, creating an illusion of stranger rape as more common than it is in reality.

The selection process of what becomes newsworthy is solely in the hands of reporters, they of course reflect current topics and discussions but the choice to omit the most typical types of rape crime and focusing solely on rapists with a foreign background reflects the model of media creating a moral panic.

Based on the qualitative data public opinion seems to be that there should be harsher sentences for rape crimes than there are now, a plea that has been present throughout the whole time period of this master's thesis.

DISCUSSION

In this final chapter I will go through the relationship between the theoretical framework laid out for the thesis and how it worked as a tool for analysis on rape crime sentencing news. I will also look to answer the final research question:

- does the current sentencing policy and the penal climate presented in the news agree with the Nordic Penal Exceptionalism thesis.

The chapter will end with ideas for future research.

The introduction of this master's thesis describes the political and societal background for the emergence of a discussion on rape crime sentencing. It covered the emergence of these discussions and located them with particular, highly publicized rape cases that the media had presented as served injustices by the Finnish criminal justice system in the past twenty years.

It explained the key terms used in the theoretical basis of this dissertation, starting from the 'punitive turn' and Garland's (2001) Culture of Control thesis, to the Ugelvik and Dullum (2012) 'Nordic penal exceptionalism'.

In order to understand current criminal policy, it was explained that Finland has followed in the footsteps of its fellow Nordic countries, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Iceland, in an emergence of a right-wing party, focused on harshening crime policy and creating a political atmosphere of division and exclusion (Pratt, 2011, p.237).

Ugelvik and Dullum's 'Nordic penal exceptionalism' thesis (2012) offers a theoretical background for the master's thesis. Finland has been seen as being able to resist the punitive trends that have prevailed in Anglophile countries since the 1980's. Since the 1990's Finland has dramatically reduced its prison population, and sentencing has remained comparatively lenient, as according to the Nordic rehabilitative ideal.

A multitude of writers (Ugelvik and Dullum (2012), Green (2012), Pratt (2005), Garland (2001)) have offered explanations for this resistance: most of the explanations are based in the social democratic nature of an equal society that retains high levels of confidence in the criminal justice system and politicians.

One of the key factors in this resistance has been the nature of Finnish media as described by Green (2012): He asserts that Nordic countries are unique in that they lack the attributes brought on by “convergence pressures, sensationalism or ‘publishing whatever brings profit’” (p.65) and that newspapers in those countries don’t display the same dominant attributes as the tabloid-driven United Kingdom does with “sensationalism, conflict, anti-elite bias, common-sense solutions and outrage” (p.66). However very little empirical evidence is given that relates directly to Finnish media.

In order to make claims of the nature and objectivity of Finnish media, they need to be backed up by current empirically studies, studies that is currently significantly absent both in Anglo-American, Scandinavian and Finnish sociological criminal studies.

This thesis did not want to take the idealistic depiction of Finnish media as a given and therefore collected a large data set from the past 15 years of Helsingin Sanomat rape crime reporting to see whether this media convergence was actually true.

Through a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of media representations of rape sentencing principles in Helsingin Sanomat, this master’s thesis argues for a reading that locates penal populist tendencies and the creation of a moral panic in the reproduction of rape crime news. In the 15 year time period that is studied, rape crime reporting has both increased and become increasingly distant from the reality of rape crime, presenting extreme and aggravated rape cases that were punished more harshly than the typical rape.

As these findings indicate, reporting has moved from extremely lenient sentences to reporting extremely harsh sentences, from reporting typical rape to reporting peculiar cases of stranger rape (unknown perpetrators) and focusing on those with a foreign background as committing more rapes.

The editorials or leading articles and articles have started to feature explicit statements of the lenient nature of Finnish legislation on rape including multiple calls for actions for politicians and the Finnish justice system, relating to the fact that the current sentencing does not reflect values and does not take the victim’s suffering into account.

The victim has been a prominent figure throughout the 15 years as compared to earlier studies conducted in Finland (Mäkelä 2000). The victim’s rights discussions culminated

in 2017 and 2018 with the emergence of the Me too-movement and allowed for a more feminist based social discussion about rape being defined by the lack of voluntariness rather than the threat or use of violence.

These features of a more victim-oriented, sensationalised reporting don't seem to coincide with the idea of Nordic, and Finnish, media being resistant to Anglophone trends of punitiveness, even when analysing a 'quality' broadsheet publication. But as Pratt (2007) states, even Scandinavian countries don't have a "natural immunity" to populism (p.172).

As Finnish politics has become more polarised and more extensive measures have been used to increase seating in the parliament, a new way of discussing penal policy has emerged since 2009 and Helsingin Sanomat has been a major contributor in expressing this new, public way of criticizing legislative procedures of sex crimes based on moral imperatives. It has also adopted the right-wing anti-immigration policies by focusing in an overtly overrepresented manner on rape crime committed by immigrants.

The reporting and editorials on foreign background perpetrators creates an us vs them moral panic where immigrants have brought in a threat to Finnish women. Although rape mostly happens between known partners at home, this does not seem to be of any interest to the Finnish media as barely any such cases are reported during the time period.

Does the reporting of rape crime in the Finnish media agree with Nordic penal exceptionalism?

Despite this wide-spread and two-decades-long discussion on sentencing policies and lenient treatment of rapists, if we look at the punishment statistics in Finland, in some ways the 'Nordic penal exceptionalism' theory seems to be right on track. Although the legislative change in 2014 did lead to the fact that a 'less severe' form of rape (pakottaminen sukupuoliyhteyteen) is now sentenced as a rape, rape sentence lengths have not increased in the 2010's (although there is a six month increase from 2000 to 2010 according to Optula 2012).

Although the discussion on consent-based legislation that appeared after the Me Too-movement in 2017 has led to positive reactions from politicians and legislators, the law

has not been passed at the time this thesis is being written. We will see in the future whether the consent-based legislation (if it goes through) will increase sentences for rape and lower the threshold of rape reporting.

Even though there have not been that many major changes in the punitive level of rape crime in Finland, as this thesis shows there are definitive punitive and penal populist tendencies in the reporting of rape crime and the media discussions that surround it. The value statements and opinions presented in the editorials or leading articles of Helsingin Sanomat explicitly define Finnish rape legislation as lenient and criticize the justice system for presenting the wrong values through their sentencing practices.

Pratt's (2011) definition of this type of penal populist tendencies in the media are well described in this quote:

"The media have fuelled perceptions that crime is increasing, adding legitimacy to those law and order lobbyists, who vividly draw attention to this menace, while detracting to that of academic commentators who discuss crime in a more detached, analytical fashion. The latter seem to play down its threat even though in the media, the main source of information about it for most people, it is ever-present, and in need of immediate punitive responses." (p.234)

As the Nordic penal exceptionalism thesis has for a long time assumed that Nordic and Finnish media have resisted this type of media representations that have penal populist tendencies and fuel moral panics this master's thesis shows that Finnish media, at least when it comes to rape crime and its sentencing policy, isn't as perfect as many criminologists and sociologist say.

Although I would argue that Helsingin Sanomat and other Finnish media outlets have helped usher in a harsher penal climate when it comes to rape crime and its sentencing, the judicial system has not made changes in punitive levels and rape sentencing lengths. Imprisonment rates have gone down in the last 10 years and sentences for rape have remained relatively steady despite public opinion and political demands.

If the future holds other changes in rape crime legislation or there are large migration movements to Finland with the end of the Covid-19 pandemic or the environmental crisis I can see this discussion surrounding immigrants as a threat to social order

becoming another moral panic moment. Other extreme rape cases will come up in the future and the same discussions about sentence lengths will reappear. It would be interesting to come back to this topic in another 10 to 15 years.

Future research

This master's thesis touches upon multiple disciplines and topics. Sociology, criminology, communications, social policy, law... but aims to keep a sociological perspective by understanding the social context where these media representations and discussions of rape crime were constructed. As such an interdisciplinary research topic the ideas and conclusions present in this master's thesis present multiple avenues for further research both thematically and methodologically.

Due to time constraints I could not set too ambitious goals, but if I could have the data would have encompassed the whole Helsingin Sanomat archive available from 1990. This would have given a better longitudinal perspective on the trends for rape crime sentencing and whether at some point typical rape made the press.

Another point of view I would have adopted with more time would have been comparing different types of newspapers to tabloid press. Covering other areas outside of the Helsinki metropolitan area and totally different types of print media like tabloids, the picture of rape crime media representations would have been more diverse and given a wider picture of the phenomenon. The hypothesis is that although having gained some tabloidized features, Helsingin Sanomat is still more objective than its tabloid counterparts like Ilta-Sanomat and Iltalehti. Yet Ilta-Sanomat is the most read online news source in Finland and reaches a larger readership than Helsingin Sanomat.

As pointed out before media has changed dramatically in the past twenty years and people gain information about crime from a more diverse spectrum of sources. Social media, internet platforms, news article's comment sections would allow for an interesting study on how people react to rape crime news, reading people's comments as to how they react to the content of a piece of news on rape crime would further explain how people form their opinions and image about crime in general.

The relationship between media and public opinion is elusive at best and poses challenges. It would be very interesting to know how media representations of rape

crime have affected the conceptions of people and their opinions on Finland's punitive levels and what the role of media has been in that process. A complex question because people's opinions and world views are constructed in complex ways.

I was extremely surprised by the finding that immigrants were this overrepresented in the quantitative data in the newspaper, and also in crime statistics on rape crime (although nothing close to the image Helsingin Sanomat creates by omitting so many of the typical rape crimes). Criminologically it would be extremely interesting to do a qualitative study on what leads to rape and why rapists become rapists, especially why those with a foreign background commit more rapes than 'Finnish' people. There are statistical analyses that have been done that standardize for different socioeconomic status and age where the gap narrows but is still more prominent. This data is of course only available for crimes that have been reported to the police. Rape is often kept under cover, and most rapes never reach the police. Criminologically this would be also an extremely interesting thing to analyze.

Sociologically it would be interesting to follow previous studies and see how the victim has been depicted in the Finnish media and whether the Me too-movement really has made an impact. In the future we'll see whether the discussion surrounding consent actually leads to changes in legislation.

My initial idea was that this two decade long discussion about lenient sentences in Finland that includes multiple experts and politicians joining in saying that the sentences for rape crime would have had a more profound effect not just in the law but sentence lengths seems to have been false as sentence lengths haven't really changed, at least not in the past ten years. This shows a clear distinction between so called public opinion and the how the judicial system actually operates and lays out sentences that would be very interesting for some studying the sociology of law, legislation and sentencing to further explore.

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